

Advisory boards' makeup could change

By Billy Ball
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MONROE County commissioners are pushing an amendment that would spell major changes to the size and makeup of two Union County advisory boards.

The new Board of Commissioners, which has launched a whirlwind of changes under Chairman Lanny Openshaw, wants to shrink the Planning Board and the Board of Adjustment while opening the Planning Board up to at-large representation.

The Planning Board is filled with appointees representing each of Union County's nine townships, but Openshaw indicated that he thinks it's an unfair arrangement because the majority of county residents live in the west.

His recommendation is to appoint members without the requirement that each township be represented, sparking the ire of some who say the setup ensures fairness for the less populated eastern part of the count.

"It's the first time people in my area feel like they had a voice," said Planning Board member Bill McGuirt, an eastern resident serving as an alternate for the board.

Under the amended ordinance, two members each would be dropped from the nine-member Planning Board and the seven-member Board of Adjustment.

The former panel advises commissioners on land-use issues. The latter handles exceptions to county land ordinances.

The three-year terms of three Planning Board members and one alternate will be up for appointment by commissioners in April.

There is no township requirement for the Board of Adjustment.

Both boards came under fire from Openshaw and critics who worry the boards don't represent Union County's population.

Commissioners have already approved "conflict of interest" forms forcing advisers to disclose land and business interests, after allegations that Planning Board members with ties to the development industry voted on their own projects.

Marshville Mayor Frank Deese decried the proposed amendment Monday, arguing it would silence the eastern voice in county land discussions.

Commissioners voted to send the text change to the Planning Board for consideration before calling for a public hearing. The Board of Commissioners will ultimately have the final say.

Two commissioners, Allen Baucom and Parker Mills, tried unsuccessfully Monday to block the amendment, county spokesman Brett Vines said.

Billy Ball can be reached at 704-261-2226 or <mailto:bball@theej.com>; target=__blank>bball@theej.com.

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